



Federal Lands Transportation Program Fact Sheet

Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails

Access to and within the National Park System has been a defining experience for generations of visitors.

The National Park Service (NPS) coordinates the planning and implementation of transportation systems that improve the visitor experience and care for national parks by:

- Preserving natural and cultural resources.
- Enhancing visitor safety and security.
- Protecting plant and animal species.
- Reducing congestion.
- Decreasing pollution.

NPS is committed to being a leader in pursuing strategies that can help make park units more enjoyable, cleaner, quieter, and more sustainable for present and future generations.

For more information, visit nps.gov/transportation

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The National Park Service (NPS) is using these and other transportation alternatives to accommodate more visitors, alleviate congestion, protect park resources, promote physical activity, and enhance the overall experience. All park trails are open to pedestrians; 28 percent are paved and shared with bicyclists. Bicycle and pedestrian access trails provide an interface between different transportation modes (i.e., park shuttle and public transportation systems) and many times are the primary link between visitors (including persons with disabilities) and the resources they come to see and experience. The vast majority of the NPS's 380 million annual visitors use some form of pedestrian, bicycle and/or trail facility. More than a dozen parks promote car-free days for bicycling and pedestrian activities.

Trails connect facilities and sites in a way that allows visitors to leave their cars behind. Popular overlooks, tourist destinations and local communities can all be linked together by front country trails, which are often used by pedestrians, families with strollers, joggers and both recreational and commuting bicyclists. In an attempt to better connect parks with the populations that surround them, the NPS Rivers, Trails, and Conservations Assistance Program is working with gateway communities to construct better front country trails—supporting the NPS Director's A Call to Action.

All totaled, the NPS inventory includes 17,872 miles of trails, of which 5,012 miles (28 percent) are front country paved trails. Additionally, there is approximately 1.4 million square feet of trail bridges and tunnels. Combined, the total replacement value of these trails is approximately \$2.5 billion. The current deferred maintenance need is over \$315 million.

In terms of condition, 21 percent of front country paved trails (1,070 miles) are in fair, poor or serious condition; 20 percent of trail bridges are in fair, poor or serious condition; and 13% of trail tunnels are in fair, poor or serious condition. Poor conditions can be hazardous, and may require closures and reduce access to park areas.

For every one million visitors who replace driving with a 10-mile bicycle trip, the savings amount to 500,000 gallons of gas. In addition to conserving fuels, those bicycle trips reduce 164 tons of carbon monoxide, 21.5 tons of nitrous oxide, and 19.5 tons of hydrocarbon emissions.



Bike path on the C&O Canal. (NPS Photo)

Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails

The NPS trail systems includes National Scenic Trails (generally over 100 miles in length and frequently crossing state lines), historic trails (commemorating historic and prehistoric routes) and recreation trails (providing numerous outdoor recreation activities). The Congress established the National Trails System in 1968. Today, the National Trails System includes 11 national scenic trails, 19 national historic trails, more than 1,200 national recreation trails, and six connecting and side trails. Together, the 30 scenic and historic trails now total almost 54,000 miles in combined length. National Recreational Trails are officially recognized by the Secretary of the Interior (as well as the US Forest Service's regional foresters) and cross into all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Here are some unique NPS bicycle and pedestrian facilities and programs:

Bike Aboard!

Since its inception in 2008, the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad "Bike Aboard!" program has served an average of 21,000 passengers each year. Cuyahoga National Park partnered with the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad to offer the program so that bicyclists can ride the Towpath Trail and then hop on the railroad for an express return to their starting location. "Bike Aboard!" offers visitors the flexibility to pedal as far as they want and then return by train. It also provides a wonderful opportunity to view the park from two different perspectives.



Bicycles on board the train at Cuyahoga Valley National Park. (NPS Photo)

Parks Offering Auto-Free Days/Areas

Some parks restricted motorized traffic at selected times and places to offer a special experience for pedestrians and bicyclists. Examples include Rock Creek Park in the District of Columbia, where road segments are closed for pedestrian and bicycle use on weekends. In Maryland, Catoctin Mountain Park hosts two auto free zones from December - March of each year to facilitate winter recreation. Grand Canyon National Park offers auto-free areas and seasons on places like the Hermit Road, which closes to motor vehicles from March through October. Cades Cove Loop Road in Great Smoky Mountains National Park is closed to motor vehicle traffic two mornings each week during the summer months. Zion National Park offers shuttle service only on Zion Canyon Drive from April 1 – October 31 each year, leaving the road mostly open for bicyclists.

Acadia National Park

The 45-mile historic Carriage Path network is a system of crushed stone aggregate paths providing pedestrian and non-motorized equipment access to park resources. Bicyclists and pedestrians can utilize this resource directly from surrounding towns without the need of a motorized vehicle. In addition, the Island Explorer public bus transportation system carried nearly 424,000 visitors in 2013. Each bus has the capacity to transport bicycles; a dedicated Bicycle Express route carried over 17,000 riders in 2013. Ridership has increased 77 percent since its establishment in 2001.

Commuter Networks

In the Washington DC area, the Mt. Vernon bike trail, the Rock Creek Park trail, and the Capital Crescent trail off of C&O Canal towpath serve thousands of commuters every day to help alleviate congestion in this region.

Bike Sharing

Bike sharing is becoming increasingly popular across the nation. The NPS is advancing this effort with programs in the nation's capital, along the Mississippi River and in San Antonio. Park visitors can rent bicycles on site and do not have to worry about bringing bikes from home.



The bike share facility at San Antonio Missions National Historical Park (NPS Photo)